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Research article

The evaluation of perpetrators and victims of peer victimization: An extended crossed-categorization approach

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Abstract

This research uses a crossed-categorization design for examining the perception of peer victimization. Using vignettes and an experimental design, perpetrator and victim evaluations of Dutch and Turkish-Dutch early adolescents were examined in terms of ethnic and gender similarities between (1) respondent and perpetrator, (2) respondent and victim, and (3) perpetrator and victim. When the perpetrator was a double-ingroup member of the respondent (same ethnicity and same gender), perpetrators were evaluated less negatively and victims less positively than when the perpetrator was a single (gender or ethnicity) or double-outgroup member. Further, when the victim was a double-ingroup member of the respondent, perpetrators were evaluated more negatively and victims more positively. No perpetrator–victim crossed-categorization effects were found for perpetrator and victim evaluations. Perceived norms of intervention in the classroom had the expected main effects but did not moderate the crossed-categorization effects. The usefulness of a crossed-categorization approach for examining the perception of negative peer behavior is discussed. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Peer victimization typically has a detrimental effect on the psychological and social health of developing children. Many efforts are being made to understand why children become involved in these negative behaviors by characterizing perpetrators and their victims (e.g., Andreou, 2001; Olweus, 1978), specifying relevant family and school characteristics (e.g., Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1994; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), and describing the roles of participating peers and bystanders (e.g., O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjokqvist, Osterman, & Kaukainen, 1996). The role of by-standing children is important because they can speak out against victimization when it occurs (see Aboud & Joong, 2008; Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008; Stevens, van Oost, & de Bourdeaudhuij, 2004).

However, research tends not to present a clear theoretical basis for explaining the perceptions and evaluations of by-standing peers. Some studies have sought to extend the theoretical understanding of peer's involvement and perceptions of victimization by adopting an intergroup perspective (e.g., Boulton, 1995; Duffy & Nesdale, 2009; Gini, 2007; Jones, Haslam, York, & Ryan, 2008). The current study uses a cross-categorization experimental design to examine the way that onlookers perceive and evaluate social exclusion and peer discrimination. The central purpose is to investigate how Dutch and Turkish-Dutch early adolescents (10–12-year-olds) evaluate both perpetrators and victims of these forms of negative peer behavior. Our aim is to show that a crossed-categorization approach can reveal systematic and predictable insights into the ways that onlookers evaluate perpetrators and victims. In doing so, we try to extend the cross-categorization model. Existing categorization research focuses on the perception and evaluation of ''isolated'' group members and not on interacting ''actors.'' For example, participants are asked to use trait adjectives for evaluating different group labels (e.g., Hagendoorn & Henke, 1991). Also, stories are used in which a description of behavior of an ingroup or an outgroup actor is given. In these stories the participants are asked to imagine that the actor is directing the behavior toward him or her (e.g., Islam & Hewstone, 1993), or the subject of the behavior is left unspecified (e.g., Crisp, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2001). However, in many real-life situations, social behavior involves multiple actors and does not have to involve the perceiver directly, but only as an observer or bystander. Victimization involves, at least, a perpetrator and a victim and in making sense of these situations, onlookers may use information about characteristics of both the perpetrator and the victim. The way a perpetrator is evaluated might depend on who the victim is in relation to the perpetrator and in relation to the onlooker (e.g., Courtney, Cohen, Deptula, & Kitzmann, 2003; Shelton, 2000). Hence, a more complex crossed-categorization design is needed for understanding people's evaluation of these kinds of negative interactions.

We investigated three types of relationships that are shown in Figure 1. We wanted to find out to what extent (cross-cutting) gender and ethnic similarity between the *R*esponding child and the *P*erpetrator (RP), between the *R*esponding child

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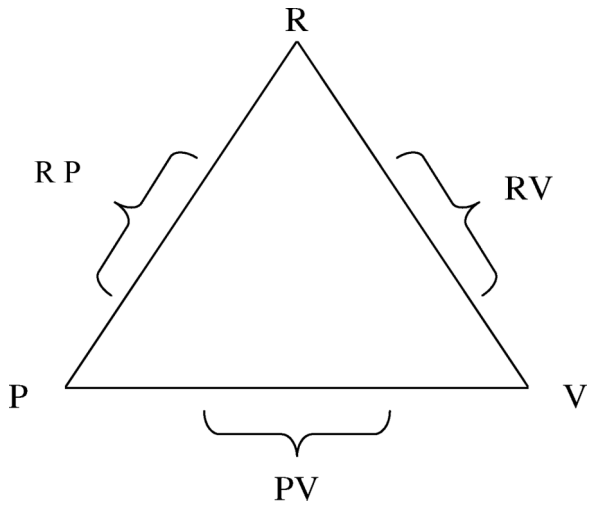

Figure 1. Three crossed-categorization relations that might influence respondents' (R) evaluations of the perpetrator (P) and the victim (V): Respondent–perpetrator (RP), respondent–victim (RV), and perpetrator–victim (PV)

and the *V*ictim (RV), and between the *P*erpetrator and the *V*ictim (PV) in the stories influences the early adolescents' evaluation of the Perpetrator and the Victim. Both ethnicity and gender are perceptually salient categories and there are many studies on children and early adolescents examining gender (see Ruble & Martin, 1998) or ethnic distinctions (see Bennett & Sani, 2004). However, children belong to both an ethnic and gender group.

Crossed-Categorization Patterns

Crossed-categorization research focuses on perceptions and evaluations of ''target others'' by using ingroup and outgroup memberships. This research typically examines social relations in situations where two dimensions of social categorization are salient at the same time such as ethnicity and gender. Children might share both ethnicity and gender with a target peer (*double-ingroup*: ii), none of the two characteristics (*double-outgroup*; oo), or one of the two characteristics (*single-gender-ingroup or single ethnic-ingroup*; io and oi).

Crossed-categorization research has identified six main models for explaining which pattern of crossed-categorization effects is most likely to occur (see Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). The most fundamental and typically observed pattern is the additive one in which evaluations of the double-ingroup (ii) are most positive, the double-outgroup target (oo) is evaluated most negatively, and the two mixed targets are equally intermediate ($ii > io = oi > oo$). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), social categorization implies self-evaluative comparison processes. Because one's self-concept is in part derived from one's group membership and individuals strive toward a positive self, they tend to positively differentiate their ingroup from relevant outgroups. Thus, there is a tendency to feel more positively toward ingroups than to outgroups. In a crossed-categorization context, this tendency leads to the additive combination in which the double-ingroup is favored most, followed by the two single ingroups, and the double-outgroup is evaluated the least positively (Crisp, Ensari, Hewstone, & Miller, 2002; Ensari & Miller, 2001).

Crossed Categorization and Negative Behavior

The crossed-categorization literature has revealed cognitive and affective moderators of the basic additive model. Crisp and Hewstone (2007) argue that both types of moderators exert their influence by increasing the salience of either the shared ingroup categorization or of the non-shared outgroup categorization. Positive affect, for example, increases the salience of ingroup categorization leading to, what is called, a social inclusion pattern of evaluation ($ii = io = oi > oo$). In contrast, negative affect would make outgroup categories more salient so that the two crossed groups shift toward the evaluation of the double-outgroup, yielding a crossed-categorization pattern of social exclusion ($ii > io = oi = oo$).

Older children have been found to evaluate peer victimization negatively and situations of peer victimization tend to elicit negative affect, not only among victims but also among bystanders (see Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; O'Connell et al., 1999). More specifically, children have been found to dislike and distance themselves from peer victimization *perpetrators* because they behave aggressively and mean (e.g., Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Gariepy, 1988; Olweus, 1990; Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). The threat to one's social identity when identifying with a perpetrator leads to the expectation of a social exclusion pattern in evaluating the perpetrator. In order to maintain a positive identity, the early adolescents can be expected to apply the most restrictive classification possible in determining who counts as an ingroup (only the double-ingroup) and who as an outgroup member (all other crossed-categorizations). Thus, we expected that the early adolescents will evaluate perpetrators of their double-ingroup least negatively and all other groups as equally more negative ($ii > io = oi = oo$).

The crossed-categorization pattern for *victim* evaluation might be more complex. On the one hand it can be argued that children sympathize and empathize with victims of peer victimization. Research has shown that already young children (4–5 years) react with sympathy and empathy to the distress of others (Eisenberg, Losoya, & Spinrad, 2003). The expression of these emotions, which are related to prosocial actions, continues in late childhood and adolescence. Positive affect increases the salience of ingroup categorization which would mean a social inclusion pattern of evaluation in which the two crossed groups are evaluated similarly as the double-ingroup.Research on peer victimization has shown, however, that children tend to dislike and distance themselves not only from perpetrators but also from victims (e.g., Courtney et al., 2003; Neary & Joseph, 1994; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). Victims tend to have fewer friends than other children and are frequently abandoned by peers (Olweus, 1990; Slee & Rigby, 1993). One reason is that victims tend to be more anxious and weaker than other children and these characteristics invite aggression and dislike from peers. In addition, victims often respond with behaviors that are viewed as undesirable by peers such as passivity and submission (Courtney et al., 2003; Schwartz et al., 1993; Schwartz, Proctor, & Chien, 2001). Thus, victims of peer victimization also tend to be disliked and to elicit negative affect. Consequently, also in evaluating the victim, early adolescents might apply the most restrictive classification possible in determining who counts as an ingroup (only the double-ingroup) and who as an outgroup member

(all other crossed-categorizations). This means that also for the victims a social exclusion pattern of evaluation can be expected.

Crossed Categorization for Perpetrator–Victim Relations

The previous section focused on the possible respondent–perpetrator (RP) and respondent–victim (RV) crossed-categorization effects. In addition, there is the perpetrator–victim (PV) crossed categorization (see Figure 1). In crossed-categorization research, the similarity of the respondent and target is central. Targets are labeled as double- or single-ingroup or outgroup members depending on the shared categorizations with the respondent. Taking the PV relationship into account results in a more complex cross-categorical design, and this complexity is necessary for understanding social interactions. From the perspective of the respondent, there are not only four crossed groups related to the perpetrator, but also four crossed groups related to the victim of the negative behavior. The combination of the two yields 16 possible pairs of perpetrators and victims. Furthermore, these 16 possible pairs were evaluated by early adolescents with a particular ethnicity and gender.

Early adolescents might evaluate perpetrators (victims) according to whether the victim (perpetrator) is a double-ingroup (e.g. Dutch boy victimizing another Dutch boy), double-outgroup (e.g. Dutch boy victimizing a Turkish girl), single-gender-ingroup (e.g. Dutch boy victimizing a Turkish boy) or single-ethnic-ingroup (e.g. Dutch boy victimizing a Dutch girl) member of the perpetrator. In this, power and status differences between the perpetrator and the victim might be important (Courtney et al., 2003; Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2005). When the perpetrator is physically or socially in a dominant position (boy versus girl, Dutch versus Turkish, or Dutch boy versus Turkish girl), children might be more negative about the perpetrator than if both perpetrator and victim are of equal physical or social standing (i.e., both are of the same ethnicity and/or gender) or if the power balance is reversed. Some support for this idea comes from Courtney et al.'s study (2003). They found that early adolescents liked perpetrators more when they victimized assertive, and thus stronger, victims than non-assertive, anxious, and submissive victims. This indicates that children are concerned with the power differential between perpetrator and victim. In addition, it was found that the early adolescents believed that perpetrators and assertive victims liked each other more than perpetrators and non-assertive victims. Thus, the early adolescents attributed a more friendly relationship to perpetrators and victims who were of a more equal standing.

These findings suggest that children evaluate perpetrators as well as victims more positively when there is a more even power relationship between the two, in comparison to situations where the perpetrator is more powerful than the victim. In the current study we are dealing with the combination of two status dimensions, ethnicity and gender. For example, if the perpetrator is a Turkish boy and the victim a Dutch girl, the perpetrator is gender dominant but belongs to the subordinate ethnic category. Compared to even power relations, uneven relationships are likely to trigger stronger negative affect that directs attention to outgroup categories and a tendency for a greater differentiation from any target that possesses outgroup characteristics. This would mean a stronger social exclusion pattern of evaluation for uneven power relationships compared to a situation of more even relationships.

Perceived Intervention Norms

For the evaluation of the perpetrator (RP) and of the victim (RV) we have predicted a social exclusion pattern of evaluation, and for the PV relationship we expect a stronger social exclusion pattern for uneven power relations compared to more even relationships. However, it is conceivable that other variables may simultaneously affect children's perpetrator and victim evaluations and these variables might also moderate the expected crossed-categorization patterns. The present research investigates the role of perceived intervention norms in the classroom.

Peer victimization is embedded in a social context and this context can be expected to affect children's group perceptions and evaluations (e.g., Bellmore, Witkow, Graham, & Juvonen, 2004; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). One important contextual factor is the social group norm regarding the acceptance of aggression and peer victimization. Peer groups differ in their norms about the acceptance of peer victimization (Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2007). The members of low victimization groups are more opposed to victimization than those of high victimization groups. A peer group that particularly stands out for children is their classmates. The present study was conducted within classrooms and it was examined whether perceived interventions in the classroom against peer victimization have an effect on perpetrator and victim evaluations. Social norms have been found to affect children's intergroup evaluations (e.g., Abrams, Rutland, & Cameron, 2003; Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005) including incidents and evaluations of peer victimization (Ojala & Nesdale, 2004; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Thus, we expected that the more classmates are perceived to intervene in peer victimization, the more negatively perpetrators will be evaluated by the early adolescents. However, we did not expect a main effect on victim evaluation because perceived norms against peer victimization typically focus on the perpetrator rather than on the victim. It is the perpetrator who is the main actor and transgressor of these norms and sympathy for the weak and victimized is less normative.

Additionally, we examined whether the perceived intervention norm affects the crossed-categorization pattern for the perpetrator evaluation. It is possible that a stronger norm makes peer victimization even more objectionable and negative. The intervention norm might make children more sensitive and aware of the social undesirability of victimizing peers on the basis of category characteristics such as gender and ethnicity (Rutland, 2004; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Normative beliefs regarding acceptable forms of categorization and stereotyping can explain differences in the use of categories and the expression of stereotypical thoughts (e.g., Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milner, 1995). This means that in a context of strong pro-intervention norms, early adolescents might be more reluctant to differentiate between categories

and targets. However, considering the fact that perpetrators are typically viewed quite negative and that, in general, peer victimization is considered unjustifiable by children and early adolescents (Verkuyten, Kinket, & Van der Wielen, 1997), it is not very likely that a classroom norm further increases its negativity and thereby results in an equivalence pattern (ii = io = oi = oo) of perpetrator evaluation. We will explore whether perceived intervention norms moderate the expected social exclusion pattern of perpetrator (and victim) evaluation.

METHOD

Participants

In total, 168 classes in 82 primary schools, located in 30 different cities and representing all regions of the Netherlands, participated in this study. At each school, children in the classes of the highest two grades were asked to respond to a short questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and none of the pupils declined.

For the purpose of this study, we selected Turkish and Dutch children who used the same ethnic label (i.e., Turkish or Dutch) for describing themselves and for both of their parents. In total, we used a sample of 2242 respondents for our analysis; 73% were Dutch ($N = 1636$) and 27% were of Turkish background ($N = 606$). The gender distribution was balanced (for the Dutch, 49% boys and 51% girls, and for the Turks, 50% boys and 50% girls). The children were between 10 and 12 years of age and the mean age was 11.3 years. People of Turkish origin form one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands. Together with the Moroccans they are evaluated the most negative in Dutch society (Hagendoorn, 1995), also by native early adolescents (Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000).

Design and Measures

In the experimental part of the questionnaire, each responding child (henceforth R) was presented with four short stories depicting a negative interaction between two peers at school: The ''perpetrator'' (P) and the ''victim'' (V). These stories were taken from a previous study on early adolescents' understanding of social exclusion and discrimination (Verkuyten et al., 1997) and were: (1) ''At the playground, a few children are playing tag. V asks P whether she can join in. P doesn't want this and does not let V join in'', (2) ''It's the teacher's birthday tomorrow and the children split up in groups to make her something. V wants to be in a group with P. P doesn't want V to join them and tells her to join a different group'', (3) ''It's P's birthday today and she is handing out sweets to her classmates. P's got a bag of sweeties and gives everyone two. When it's V's turn she only gives her one instead of two'', and (4) ''P has been picked to hand out balls in the playground. V comes over to P and asks him for a ball. But P gives the balls to the other children instead.''

Gender (boy vs. girl) and ethnicity (Turkish vs. Dutch) of P and V were varied systematically in each of the four scenarios presented to the children, thereby generating 16 possible P–V-story combinations. As shown in Table 1, an incomplete random block design was used. Because of demand-load each responding child was presented with four PV combinations (a different one for each of the four stories). For example, some children were presented with a ''teacher'' story in which a Turkish girl victimized a Dutch boy, a ''schoolyard'' story in which a Dutch boy victimizes a Turkish girl, a ''sweets'' story in which a Turkish boy victimizes a Dutch girl, and a ''balls'' story in which a Dutch girl victimizes a Turkish boy (see Table 1, questionnaire version 2). Yet, other children were presented with four stories in which P and V were both of the same gender *and* ethnicity (double-ingroup condition between P and V; see Table 2, questionnaire version 4). This design allows us to determine to what extent children use ethnicity and gender in their judgments and also to control for the possible effects of P–V combinations on the evaluation of the perpetrator and victim. However, it should be noted that the two dimensions in our study, ethnicity and gender, are binary. This implies that the PV relation *logically* depends on the RP and RV relations. For instance, if RP = io and RV = oi, then necessarily PV = oo. In statistical terms, with two binary dimensions, the PV crossed categorization is a (restricted version) of the interaction of the RP and RV crossed categorizations. We will return to the implications of this below.

In addition, certain sets of P–V combinations are restricted to certain stories (see Table 1). This means, for instance, that all children who received the first version of the questionnaire only rated the following four PV combinations: A Turkish boy victimizing a Dutch boy and vice versa, a Dutch girl victimizing a Turkish girl and vice versa (see Table 1,

Table 1. The incomplete random block design

Story		Teacher		Schoolyard		Sweets		Balls	
Questionnaire version	Actor type	Ethnicity	Gender	Ethnicity	Gender	Ethnicity	Gender	Ethnicity	Gender
1	Perpetrator	T	♂	D	♀	T	♀	D	♂
	Victim	D	♂	T	♀	D	♀	T	♂
2	Perpetrator	T	♀	D	♂	T	♂	D	♀
	Victim	D	♂	T	♀	D	♀	T	♂
3	Perpetrator	D	♀	T	♂	D	♂	T	♀
	Victim	D	♂	T	♀	D	♀	T	♂
4	Perpetrator	D	♂	T	♀	D	♀	T	♂
	Victim	D	♂	T	♀	D	♀	T	♂

Note: D = Dutch, T = Turkish, ♂ = male, ♀ = female.

Table 2. Analyses of perpetrator and victim evaluations using linear mixed models assuming within-subject compound symmetry ($N = 2242$)

	Perpetrator evaluation		Victim evaluation	
	Coef.	*SE*	Coef.	*SE*
Fixed effects				
Respondent–perpetrator crossed	LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 12.39$, $p = .006$		LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 13.27$, $p = .004$	
Double-ingroup	.054**	0.015	−.039*	0.013
Single-gender-ingroup	.022	0.014	.010	0.012
Single-ethnic-ingroup	.023	0.015	.001	0.013
Double-outgroup	*Ref.*		*Ref.*	
Respondent–Victim crossed	LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 14.10$, $p = .003$		LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 17.11$, $p = .001$	
Double-ingroup	−.049*	0.015	.045**	0.013
Single-gender-ingroup	−.024	0.014	.026	0.012
Single-ethnic-ingroup	−.015	0.015	.014	0.013
Double-outgroup	*Ref.*		*Ref.*	
Perpetrator–Victim crossed	LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 2.04$, $p = .564$		LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 5.18$, $p = .159$	
Double-ingroup	−.021	0.030	−.038	0.032
Single-gender-ingroup	−.015	0.030	−.074	0.032
Single-ethnic-ingroup	.019	0.031	−.036	0.032
Double-outgroup	*Ref.*		*Ref.*	
Perceived intervention norms	−.094*	0.016	.010	0.017
Respondent traits	LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 5.97$, $p = .113$		LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 35.84$, $p = .000$	
Male	−.063	0.035	−.042	0.044
Dutch	−.083	0.035	.159**	0.038
Male × Dutch	.071	0.049	−.036	0.052
Perpetrator traits	LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 6.62$, $p = .085$		LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 11.16$, $p = .011$	
Male	.013	0.014	−.006	0.012
Dutch	−.018	0.015	.035*	0.013
Male × Dutch	−.017	0.019	−.015	0.018
Victim traits	LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 87.48$, $p = .000$		LR $\chi^2_{3df} = 15.77$, $p = .001$	
Male	−.013	0.014	.017	0.012
Dutch	.071**	0.015	−.008	0.013
Male × Dutch	.053*	0.019	−.043*	0.017
Story order	−.033	0.021	.252**	0.022
Constant	.790**	0.060	1.054**	0.064
Random effects				
Variance (story)	.413**	0.013	.417**	0.011
Covariance ($story_i$,$story_j$)	.204*	0.008	.248*	0.009
Variance (class)	.005	0.002	.003	0.004
Variance (school)	.000	0.000	.006	0.004
−2 Log(likelihood–random effects only)	15266.53		14135.33	
−2 Log(likelihood–full model with $df = 26$)	14938.71		13801.13	

* $= p < .01$, ** $= p < .001$; two-sided p-values; unstandardized coefficients.

questionnaire version 1). Furthermore, the specific combination of a Turkish boy victimizing a Dutch boy would only occur in the teacher story of questionnaire 1 and hence only be rated in the context of that specific story (see Table 1, questionnaire 1). This implies that the design does not enable to fully disentangle the effect of story from the perpetrator–victim effect.

As in other crossed-categorization studies, ethnicity and gender were represented in the stories using first names (e.g., Crisp et al., 2001; Verkuyten et al., 1997). In The Netherlands, first names are clear indicators of Dutch or Turkish background. Typical and familiar Dutch names (e.g., Maarten, Petra) were contrasted with typical and familiar Turkish names (e.g., Ayla, Ahmet). The advantage of using name labels is that information on the gender and ethnicity of the story characters is available to the children simultaneously. Further, the use of names makes the scenario's more concrete and easier to imagine than the use of labels such as a ''Dutch boy'' or a ''Turkish girl.'' In contrast to names, these labels explicitly direct participants' attention and suggest that one characteristic (ethnicity) is a qualification of the other characteristic (gender).

Children were asked to evaluate, first, the perpetrator and then the victim of the negative behavior, using the seven-point scale of seven ''faces'' as developed and validated by Yee and Brown (1992). This scale was designed to elicit children's ''general affective orientation toward the person'' (Yee & Brown, 1992, p. 622). The children were asked to indicate ''how positive or negative you feel toward [P] and [V].'' A higher score indicates a more positive feeling toward the perpetrator or victim. To reduce the consequences of the skewness of the distributions of the Perpetrator and Victim evaluations, the logarithms of these evaluations were used as the two dependent variables in our analysis.[1]

[1]Research from the perspective of social cognitive domain theory indicates that children tend to consider social exclusion less wrongful than the unequal distribution of goods and resources that raises moral issues about justice (e.g., Killen et al., 2005). Additional analysis of our data showed that children did indeed evaluate perpetrators significantly less negatively, and the victim more positively, when the victimization involved social exclusion rather than unequal distribution of goods. However, the type of victimization did not affect the other findings and did not moderate the crossed categorization patterns found.

Crossed Categorization of the Data and Intervention Norms

In our statistical models we included three categorical variables representing the crossed categorization with respect to ethnicity and gender of the respondent and the perpetrator (RP), of the respondent and the victim (RV), and of the perpetrator and the victim (PV). For example, RP = 1 if R and P were double-ingroup members, sharing both ethnicity and gender; RP = 2 if R related to P as a single-gender-ingroup, sharing only gender; RP = 3 if R is related to P as single-ethnic-ingroup, sharing only ethnicity; finally, RP = 4 if R and P are double-outgroup members, sharing neither gender nor ethnicity. The variables RV and PV were defined analogously. Specifying our statistical models in terms of these crossed-categorization variables and their interactions with respondent characteristics made the interpretation of the results in terms of our theoretical expectations more direct and intuitive, compared to an equivalent specification in the conventional (multivariate) analysis of variance) style analysis with main effects and interactions (up to order 6) of R, P, and V variables, in which there is no direct link between model parameters and crossed-categorization patterns.

In order to investigate whether perceived intervention norms in the classroom affect perpetrator and victim evaluations, we presented the respondents with a short introduction in which an example was given of a child who was victimized at school: ''At a school here in town there is a child who is frequently bullied by the other children in the class.'' Subsequently, the children were asked to imagine that this happened at their own school and to respond to the following four questions: (1) Would your teacher say something about this? (2) Would other children in your class intervene? (3) Would you tell your teacher about this? (4) Would other children in your class tell the teacher? We focused on these kinds of behavioral interventions because these are visible signs of the unacceptability of peer victimization. Children responded on a five-point scale, ranging from ''no, never'' to ''yes, very often.'' Cronbach's α for the four-item scale was .63. The intraclass correlation of this measure was low ($\rho = 0.10$, $SE = 0.01$ for the average class size). Therefore, we can include perceived intervention norms as an individual rather than as a contextual factor. A higher score indicates a stronger perceived peer victimization intervention norm. The mean score was around the midpoint (sometimes) of the scale ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 0.70$).

Control Variables

In addition to our main predictor variables, we included R's, P's, and V's ethnicity (Dutch/Turkish) and gender (boy/girl) as control variables. Interactions between ethnicity and gender of the respondent were included as well. Furthermore, we controlled for the order in which the stories were presented.

Statistical Modeling

We examined separate linear mixed models for the evaluation of the perpetrator and for the evaluation of the victim using maximum likelihood (McCulloch & Searle, 2001), applying the MIXED command in SPSS 16. The cross-categorization effects for RP, RV, and PV were represented by three factors with four levels each, with indicator contrasts (''dummying'' them up). Below we also discuss models with interactions of the three crossed categorizations with each other, and with gender and ethnicity of the respondent. Due to the random assignment of questionnaires to respondents, the effects of crossed categorizations and respondent (and perpetrator and victim) characteristics were orthogonal (uncorrelated). Thus, the effects of, for example, respondent characteristics on evaluations do *not* depend on whether or not crossed-categorization variables are included in the model: Nothing is learned from presenting a hierarchy of models. Therefore, we report only results for the full models.

Story was specified as a repeated measure with a ''compound symmetric'' structure on the repeated measures (co)variance matrix ''across stories.''[2] In addition, additive random effects for class and school were included to account for possible statistical interdependence of subjects sharing social contexts. Please note that we consider these variance and covariance parameters as ''nuisance parameters'' included in the model to adequately represent the data generation process. Since these parameters are not essential for the interpretation of our analysis, we restrict ourselves to noting that the differences between classes and schools proved to be negligible and non-significant in all analyses.[3] Considering the large sample size we used $p < .01$ as the minimal level of significance.

RESULTS

Perpetrator Evaluation

The mean overall score for perpetrator evaluation was 2.21 ($SD = 1.73$; logarithms $M = 0.55$, $SD = 0.66$, range = 0–1.95), and this score was significantly below the neutral midpoint of the scale, $t(2242) = 65.01$, $p < .001$.

The first column of Table 2 presents the parameter estimates of a linear mixed model of children's perpetrator evaluations. Regarding the crossed-categorization effects, the results support the predictions. When the *perpetrator* is a double-ingroup member of the responding child, the perpetrator was evaluated less negatively than in all other cases. The other three crossed-categorization categories are more or less equivalent ($ps > .10$). Conversely, when the *victim*

[2]We also fitted the models with the unrestricted covariance matrix across the repeated measures. This is the least restrictive specification with ten parameters allowing for different residual variances for the four stories and for the different covariances between the six pairs of stories. Likelihood ratio tests were used to test the compound symmetry structures against the unrestricted structures. For perpetrator and for victim evaluation, these tests were highly significant (for perpetrators, LR χ^2 $(8df) = 235.32$, $p < .001$; for victims: LR χ^2 $(8df) = 179.21$, $p < .001$), reflecting that in our large sample also small and substantively uninteresting differences were statistically significant. However, the fixed effects and their standard errors only differed minimally between these alternative repeated measures specifications. Therefore, we decided to present the simpler models with compound symmetry.

[3]Story order did not have an effect on children's perpetrator evaluations. However, since the interaction between story order and victimization type is unidentified due to design limitations, we cannot be completely sure that no story order effect occurred.

is a double-ingroup member of the responding child the perpetrator is evaluated more negatively than when the victim is only a single-gender, single-ethnicity, or double-outgroup member of the respondent. Hence, the findings for both RP and RV crossed-categorization effects are in line with a social exclusion pattern (ii > io = oi = oo).

In addition, there is no evidence that the PV crossed categorization had an impact on the perpetrator evaluation (Likelihood Ratio (LR) χ^2 (3*df*) = 2.04; $p = .564$; from now on we refer to Table 2 for tests). Hence, an equivalence pattern of evaluation is found (ii = io = oi = oo).

In the fitted model, the effects of gender and ethnicity were (approximately) orthogonal to the categorization effects, and, hence, their interpretation is straightforward. We found no significant differences between Dutch and Turkish respondents and also not between boys and girls. Additionally, whereas we found no indication for an effect of perpetrators' own characteristics on perpetrators evaluation, victim characteristics turned out to be relevant. When the victim was Dutch, children rated the perpetrator significantly less negatively than when the victim was Turkish. The interaction between victim's gender and ethnicity was also significant. Compared to the victim being a Turkish girl, children reported less negative evaluations of the perpetrator when the victim was a Dutch boy or girl and more negative evaluations when the victim was a Turkish boy.

Victim Evaluation

The mean overall score for victim evaluation was 3.63 ($SD = 1.75$; logarithms $M = 1.31$, $SD = 0.68$, range = 0–1.95). Although in absolute terms this is close to 4.0, it was significantly below this neutral midpoint of the scale, $t(2242) = 13.08$, $p < .001$. Thus, the victims were also evaluated negatively.

In general and as predicted, the crossed-categorization effects for the victim evaluation were comparable to those for the perpetrator evaluation. This can be inferred from comparing columns one and three in Table 2. As with perpetrator evaluation, the RP's double-ingroup relationship significantly influenced the evaluation of the victim. When the perpetrator is a double-ingroup member of the responding child, the victim was evaluated less positively than in all other cross-categorization cases (*p*s > .05). Thus, as expected the RP crossed-categorization effects on victim evaluation also followed a social exclusion pattern.

This pattern is also found for the effect of the RV crossed categorization on victim evaluation. Victims were evaluated more positively when they were double-ingroup members of the responding child rather than double-outgroup members. The evaluations for the other three cross-categorization categories are quite similar.

Again, it turned out that the PV crossed-categorization was not significant providing evidence for the equivalence pattern of evaluation.

In relation to perpetrator and victim characteristics, it was found that the victim evaluation did not depend on the victim's own ethnic and gender characteristics, or their combination. Recall that due to the orthogonality of individual characteristics and crossed classifications, the interpretations are straightforward. However, there was evidence that the characteristics of the perpetrator matter. More specifically, we found an effect for perpetrator's ethnicity on victim evaluation: When the perpetrator was Dutch the victim was evaluated more positively than when the perpetrator was Turkish. Further, there were ethnic but no gender main effects. Dutch early adolescents were more positive about victims than Turkish children.

Perpetrator–victim Status Differences

The findings for the PV relationship indicate an equivalence pattern of evaluation for both the perpetrator and the victim. However, status or power constellations between perpetrator and victim might influence P and V evaluations. Therefore, we constructed a factor representing the nine possible PV status configurations.[4] It turned out that the status variable was not significant for perpetrators, LR $\chi^2(6df) = 2.50$, $p = .869$, and also not for victims, LR $\chi^2(6df) = 9.97$, $p = .126$.

As argued before, the PV crossed classification as well as the Perpetrator–Victim status differences are in fact constrained versions of the standard interaction of RP and RV. These more general interactions of RP and RV, however, were also not significant for perpetrator evaluation (LR $\chi^2(9df) = 5.\ 31$, $p = .807$) and for victim evaluation (LR $\chi^2(9df) = 8.26$, $p = .508$). Thus, there is no evidence that children systematically considered the Perpetrator–Victim relation when evaluating either the perpetrator or the victim.

Perceived Intervention Norm

We expected norms in the classroom against peer victimization to affect the evaluation of the perpetrator but not of the victim. As shown in Table 2, the perceived intervention norm indeed has a significant negative main effect on perpetrator evaluation. Respondents who perceived that they and others are frequently intervening in cases of victimization evaluated the perpetrator more negatively than respondents who perceived that they and others were rarely stepping in if a peer was victimized. In contrast, and as expected, there is no evidence that the perceived norm influences children's victim evaluations.

We examined whether the intervention norm moderates the crossed-categorization pattern of the perpetrator evaluation. Thus, we tested for interactions between the crossed-categorization variables and intervention perception. Likelihood ratio tests for the six interactions were not significant (*p*s > .10). Thus, there is no evidence that perceived intervention norms affect how or how strongly children categorize social relations.

[4]The following nine status configurations were distinguished: 1 = perpetrator and victim are of the same gender and ethnicity; 2 = a boy victimizing a girl of the same ethnicity; 3 = a girl victimizing a boy of the same ethnicity; 4 = Turkish child victimizing a Dutch child of the same gender; 5 = a Dutch child victimizing a Turkish child of the same gender; 6 = a Turkish girl victimizing a Dutch boy; 7 = a Dutch boy victimizing a Turkish girl; 8 = a Dutch girl victimizing a Turkish boy; and, 9 = a Turkish boy victimizing a Dutch girl.

Ethnic and Gender Differences

Finally, we investigated whether the RP, RV, and PV crossed-categorization effects on perpetrator and victim evaluation differ between Dutch and Turkish children, and between girls and boys. For this purpose, we examined interactions between type of respondent (four levels) and each of the RP, RV, and PV crossed-categorization factors. Likelihood ratio tests for each of these interactions as well as jointly over the crossed-categorization factors yielded no significant ($ps > .05$) differences in evaluations of perpetrators or victims. Inspection of the results with Bonferroni's method for *post-hoc* testing did not reveal significant interaction effects. Thus, no evidence is found that the effects of crossed-categorizations on perpetrator or victim evaluation differs across ethnicity and gender of the respondents.

DISCUSSION

In evaluating situations of peer victimization, onlookers can be expected to use information about the different actors and the type of interaction they are involved in. We examined perpetrator–victim–respondent triads (Figure 1). In order to give interactive accounts of peer victimization, vignettes were used in which both the role of the perpetrator and the victim were varied systematically for ethnicity and gender. The findings demonstrate that respondent–perpetrator and respondent–victim crossed categorizations had an impact on both perpetrator and victim evaluations. The evaluation of the perpetrator depended not only on who the perpetrator was in relation to the respondent, but also on who the victim was in relation to the respondent. The same was found for victim evaluation.

Peer victimization is typically evaluated negatively by older children (Hawkins et al., 2001; O'Connell et al., 1999). The perception of negative ethnic and gender peer interactions raises social identity concerns. Gender and ethnicity are two highly self-relevant dimensions for early adolescents. Children might be reluctant to identify with perpetrators as well as with victims because the former are perceived as nasty and asocial and the latter as weak and anxious (Courtney et al., 2003). Consequently, in order to maintain a positive identity early adolescents can react by making the ingroup classification as restrictive as possible. They seek to distance themselves from as many perpetrators and victims as they can. As a result, only double-ingroup members are considered as ''ingroup'' and all others as ''outgroups.'' Evidence that such an identity-serving mechanism operates in cross categorization contexts comes from other studies (e.g., Hagendoorn & Henke, 1991; Vescio, Judd, & Chua, 2006).

Thus, we expected a social exclusion pattern of evaluation for both the perpetrator and the victim. The results supported these predictions. When the perpetrator was a double-ingroup member rather than a partial-ingroup or a double-outgroup member of the respondent, the perpetrator was evaluated less negatively and the victim less positively. Conversely, when the victim was a double-ingroup member rather than a partial-ingroup or double-outgroup member of the respondent, the perpetrator was evaluated more negatively and the victim more positively. Thus, the crossed-categorization pattern of social exclusion offers the most adequate account for the evaluation of negative social behavior.

Perpetrator–Victim Relationship

In addition to the respondent–perpetrator and respondent–victim crossed-categorization, we extended the common crossed-categorization approach by examining whether the crossed-category relationship between perpetrator and victim affects early adolescents' evaluations. It is possible that the evaluation of the perpetrator depends on who the victim is, and vice versa. However, the findings show equivalence patterns ($ii = io = oi = oo$) for both the perpetrator evaluation and for the victim evaluation, and these patterns were not moderated by perceived intervention norms in the classroom. A possible explanation for this result is cognitive overload. The consideration of the PV relationship leads to a complex crossed-categorization task in which there are 16 possible combinations, in addition to the respondents' own ethnicity and gender. With a difficult task it is less likely that category information that differentiates targets is encoded or used (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). In their meta-analysis of the crossed-categorization literature, Urban and Miller (1998) identified cognitive overload as a moderator of the basic additive model. They note that cognitive overload can lead to an equivalence pattern of evaluations in which targets are evaluated independently of the two categorization dimensions. This is especially likely when the category information is not made highly salient. In the current study, early adolescents were not presented with explicit category information but, rather, ethnicity and gender were represented in stories by using first names. Thus, the lack of explicit category information and the substantial amount of information that needed to be processed when considering the PV relationship in itself and in relation to oneself might explain the equivalence pattern for this relationship. Future research should examine this interpretation more systematically, for example, by making category information more explicit and by examining older age groups that are able to handle more complex information.

We examined the PV relationship not only in terms of the categorical similarities with the respondent but also in terms of the power and status balances of the perpetrator and victim. It turned out that there was no crossed-categorization effects of these balances on perpetrator and victim evaluations. The fact that we did not find an effect for the power and status differences between perpetrators and victims further suggest the role of cognitive overload: The great number of status inconsistencies that were implied in the categories used and the fact that the categories and status differences were not made salient explicitly (e.g., when a Turkish boy victimizes a Dutch girl, the perpetrator is low on the ethnic status dimension but high on the gender status dimension). The interpretation of cognitive overload for the PV relationship is supported by the fact that we found some evidence that the early adolescents did pay attention to status differences in the cognitively less demanding RP and RV relationships. For example, victims were rated more positively when the perpetrator was Dutch rather than Turkish. This indicates that participants took ethnic status differences into account.

The lack of crossed-categorization effects of the balances on perpetrator and victim (PV) evaluations might also be due, however, to the incomplete random block design that we used and in which perpetrator–victim constellations were fixed to certain story types. The story type might have partially moderated the effect of status imbalances on perpetrator and victim evaluations. Yet, another explanation is that for the participants the types of peer victimizations depicted in the stories are not prototypical for ethnic and gender status asymmetries. Possibly, if we had used stories in which peers physically attack each other or are involved in ethnic name-calling, children might have been more likely to attend to power and status (in)balances. For example, Verkuyten et al. (1997) found that early adolescents are more likely to label negative peer interactions as ethnic discrimination (thereby implying power asymmetries) in the context of name calling rather than in the context of social exclusion or the unequal distribution of goods.

At this point a theoretical-methodological point is relevant. The dimensions used in the current study are binary. Therefore, the PV crossed categorization is logically implied by the RP and RV relations. For example, when the respondent is of the same gender but different ethnicity as the perpetrator and differs in gender and ethnicity from the victim, the perpetrator and victim are necessarily of different gender and same ethnicity. Methodologically this means that the PV crossed categorization can be seen as a special case of the RP $\times$ RV interaction, in which some interaction coefficients associated with the same R are constrained to be equal. A similar limitation applies to the status variable. As a consequence, when our results would indicate evidence for a PV crossed-categorization or status effect, this might also be interpreted as evidence for a RP $\times$ RV interaction effect. To tell these two interpretations apart, we would have to use a design with non-binary classifications. This is possible with ethnicity but clearly not with gender. In the current study we did not find evidence for PV crossed-categorization or status effects on the perpetrator and victim evaluations. In fact, the RP $\times$ RV interactions in models without PV were not significant. It is possible, of course, that the ''true'' RP $\times$ RV interaction and PV crossed categorizations have opposite effects that more or less cancel out. However, we have no theoretical reasons in support of this idea.

Perceived Intervention Norms

We were interested in perceived intervention norms in the classroom as a context variable that might influence children's perpetrator and victim evaluations. We expected that in classes in which peer victimization is perceived to be less accepted, early adolescents will evaluate perpetrators more negatively than in classes where peer victimization is more common. We also expected that victim evaluations would not be affected by the normative context. It turned out that early adolescents who perceived themselves, their teachers, and classmates to be frequently intervening in cases of peer victimization did indeed evaluate perpetrators more negatively than children who perceived that they and others were less frequently intervening. In contrast, victim evaluations were not affected by the perceived intervention norm. These main effects indicate that social norms have specific, norm-consistent, effects and they provide further support for the role of norms on children's intergroup evaluations (e.g., Abrams et al., 2003; Nesdale et al., 2005; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004).

We also examined whether perceived intervention norms moderate the crossed-categorization patterns of perpetrator and victim evaluations. No evidence was found that the social exclusion patterns were affected by these norms. In general, peer victimization is considered negative and unjustifiable by early adolescents and the perceived intervention norm does not seem to increase the negativity to such a degree that the evaluation of a double-ingroup perpetrator (or victim) is equal to single ingroup and double-outgroup members. However, it should be noted that the reliability of our normative scale was rather low and that the low intraclass correlation indicates that the perceived norm is an individual difference variable rather than a classroom characteristic. Thus, the relevance of social norms could be examined further. In doing so it is also interesting to consider the role of ethnic and gender normative and non-normative behavior. For example, ethnic name calling tends to be more blameworthy when majority compared to minority group children are the perpetrators (Verkuyten et al., 1997), and some forms of bullying might be rather unusual for girls compared to boys.

Ethnic Group and Gender

It addition to intervention norms in the classroom we also examined whether the crossed-categorization patterns differed between ethnic majority and minority early adolescents and between male and female respondents. No ethnic or gender differences were found. This is similar to Killen and Stangor's study (2001) that showed that the exclusion of white and black children was considered equally wrong by white and African-American participants (see Killen et al., 2005). The same has been found for gender distinctions (e.g., Theimer, Killen, & Stangor, 2001). Hence, similar social-psychological processes seem to be operating for Dutch and Turkish early adolescents and for boys and girls. The absence of ethnic and gender differences offers evidence for the generalizability of the processes underlying crossed-categorization patterns of evaluation. The only ethnic difference found was that compared to the Turks, the Dutch early adolescents tended to evaluate victims more positively. It is not clear how this difference should be explained but it might be related to Turkish children having more experience with and knowledge about ethnic peer victimization (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

Limitations

To evaluate the present results, several limitations of the research will be considered. First, certain ethnic and gender combinations of perpetrators and victims were fixed for particular stories. Therefore, we could not fully disentangle the effect of story and the effects of the different crossed-categorizations and status differentials on perpetrator and victim evaluations. Thus, it is useful to replicate the research by using an even more complete design in order to assess the validity of the current findings.

Second, we focused on the dimensions of ethnicity and gender because these are highly salient and important for early adolescents living in ethnically mixed countries like the Netherlands. It is unclear, however, to what extent our findings generalize to other categorization dimensions. We also had no information about the relative importance of both categories for the participants' self-understandings. Future research could include measures of ethnic and gender identification.

Third, following existing crossed-categorization research, the stories provided only minimal information about the actors and the context of the peer victimization. This means that, for example, the reasons for the victimization, the victim's reaction to being victimized, and the social context of the victimization were not mentioned. However, these types of information can affect perpetrator and victim evaluations (e.g., Courtney et al., 2003; Verkuyten et al., 1997) and therefore might influence the social exclusion pattern that we found. Furthermore, participants were given written descriptions of negative interactions. Evaluations of these descriptions can differ from observations of actual interactions. In addition, peer victimization can take many different forms, such as social rejection, name-calling, teasing and theft, and can be incidental or repetitive. It has to be examined whether the current findings generalize to other forms and contexts of peer victimization.

Considering the large sample size we used a 1% level of significance as minimum, but it should be noted that the significant effects are not very strong. This might be due to the short, written descriptions that were used and that lack vividness. It is possible that the effects are stronger when, for example, images and short films are presented to the children. In addition, stronger effects might be found for other forms of victimization. We focused on relatively mild forms of social exclusion and unequal treatment. It is likely that more severe or systematic types of peer victimization will more strongly raise social identity concerns and, therefore, lead to an even clearer tendency to distance oneself from similar perpetrators and victims. Research has shown that individuals try to avoid in-group responsibility for actions that relatively strongly affect another group negatively (Zebel, Doosje, & Spears, 2009). Especially high group identifiers who are presented with reminders of in-group responsibility for negative actions try to disengage themselves from the implications of their group's behavior (Cehajic, Brown, & Gonzalez, 2009). Future studies should examine the usefulness of the cross-categorization approach for understanding more severe forms of peer victimization, also in relation to group identification. In addition, children's own involvements in peer victimization might be an important factor to consider (Nesdale, Maass, Kiesner, Durkin, Griffiths, & James, 2009).

CONCLUSION

There is an extensive literature on aggressive children and another literature on victimized children. There is very little work, however, on perpetrator and victim interactions and on the ways that onlookers or bystanders evaluate these interactions. This is unfortunate because bystanding children can speak out against victimization when it occurs (Aboud & Joong, 2008; Stevens et al., 2004). Our findings demonstrate the importance of studying multiple categorization effects on the perception of negative peer interactions. We have tried to show that a crossed-categorization approach offers a systematic way for examining the evaluation of peer victimization as a form of negative interaction. The findings indicate that in evaluating perpetrators and victims, early adolescents take different social category memberships into account simultaneously. Not only the memberships of the two actors but also of themselves. Specifically, our research indicates that the evaluation of actors involved in negative behavior yields a crossed-categorization pattern of social exclusion for both perpetrators and victims. Furthermore, although not found in our study, it is possible that the similarity between the perpetrator and victim is important for the respondents' evaluations, for example, when the category information is made highly salient or among late adolescents and adults who are better able to process complex information.

To our knowledge, the present study is the first to go beyond the existing research on crossed categorization by focusing on the evaluation of negative social interactions. Furthermore, an extended crossed-categorization design was used in which more than a single actor was involved. This design has the advantage of more closely resembling negative intergroup situations in which people are actually engaged in situations of exclusion and victimization. The ''single target'' model used in crossed-categorization research may not be very adequate for investigating the complexity of negative social interactions in real-world settings. Our findings further indicate that social psychological theory can advance developmental science and the understanding of intergroup relations among children in particular. In addition, the results show that multiple categorizations are meaningful for early adolescents and support the developmental aspects of crossed-categorization patterns. Thus, our research contributes to recent attempts to integrate developmental and social psychological perspectives on peer relations (see Killen, Rutland, & Jampol, 2009; Levy & Killen, 2008).

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